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AUTHOR Sherohman, James
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ABSTRACT

During the early decades of social science in the United States, the strong applied emphasis in sociology and the mutual interest of sociology and social work in social reform made these disciplines nearly indistinguishable. The dissolution in 1909 of the American Social Science Association began a period of divergence between the two disciplines that continued until recent decades, when the two disciplines began converging again. The trend in undergraduate education today toward applied sociology curricula should increase the advantages of cooperation for both sociology and social work. For example, social work students will be more effective practitioners if they are exposed to sociological theories and concepts that can be translated into terms usable in social work practice. Four obstacles to cooperation are conceptions of differences between the two disciplines, overlapping interests of the two disciplines which blur disciplinary boundaries, competition for students, and departmental politics which impede cooperation in combined departments. Alternative paths to cooperation include merging applied sociology and social work into a single program, making social work courses available as options for applied sociology students, and incorporating social work courses as electives in the applied sociology program. (RM)

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Applied Sociology and Social Work

James Sherohman
Department of Sociology, Anthropology,
and Social Work
St. Cloud State University

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Probably the most important trend in undergraduate sociology education today is the rising popularity of applied sociology curricula. One important issue in the design and implementation of applied curricula that so far has received little attention is the relationship between applied sociology and other disciplines that use knowledge developed by sociologists. Social work is especially important in this regard because of the historically close connection between undergraduate education in sociology and social work. Most social work programs originated in sociology departments and many are still located in combined departments with sociology. The overlapping concerns of social work and applied sociology increase the potential contributions of social work to applied sociology programs. At the same time, concerns over competition and disciplinary identity make social work a potential source of opposition to the development of applied sociology programs.

In the following pages I will review the historical relationship between social work and sociology (especially with regard to undergraduate education), the potential benefits of cooperation between undergraduate programs in these two disciplines, obstacles to such cooperation, and alternative ways of coordinating social work content with applied sociology programs.

HISTORICAL TRENDS

Disciplinary Trends

During the early decades of social science in the United States, a close relationship existed between the disciplines of sociology and social work. The strong applied emphasis in sociology and the mutual interest of sociology and social work in social reform made these disciplines

nearly indistinguishable (Munson, 1979:612; Queen, 1981:35). The dissolution in 1909 of the American Social Science Association began a period of divergence between the two disciplines that continued until recent decades.

Although the 1920's and 1930's produced some collaboration between social workers and sociologists in the study of social problems (Queen, 1981:36), by 1940 divergent trends in sociology and social work had created a sharp separation between the disciplines. Sociologists emphasized basic research in an effort to establish sociology as a respectable scientific discipline within the university. Social workers, concerned with establishing social work as a profession, emphasized casework and the psychoanalytic approach.

In recent decades the disciplines of sociology and social work have been converging once again. Since the 1950's social workers have placed an increased emphasis on the relevance of sociology and other social sciences for social work education and practice (Coyle, 1958; Meyer, et al., 1967; Heraud, 1970; Kamerman, et al., 1973; Meenaghan, 1979; Leighninger and Leighninger, 1980). The recent revival of interest in applied sociology should result in sociological theory and concepts that are more closely related to the level of practice, further enhancing the value of sociology for social workers. At the same time, this renewed concern with practical applications will increase the relevance of social work for sociology.

Trends in Undergraduate Education

In general, relationships between sociology and social work in undergraduate education have been closer and more stable than the overall relationship between the disciplines. Bromley and Weed (1978) describe the historical relationship between sociology and social work in undergraduate

education as an "uneasy alliance," in which social work courses were taught within sociology departments. In the early decades of the Twentieth Century, most social work content was covered in sociology courses--such as social problems, social disorganization, and applied sociology (Bromley and Weed, 1978:169). Later, social work courses became a clearly identified and significant component of sociology curricula. A study conducted in 1941 found that courses in social work, public welfare, and child welfare together accounted for 11% of all course offerings in sociology departments (Kennedy and Kennedy, 1942). When this study was replicated in 1957, these courses still accounted for 8% of all course offerings in sociology (Podell, et al., 1959). A survey of small liberal arts colleges in 1963 found that 60% of the sociology departments surveyed offered a course in social work (Gates, 1969).

The "alliance" was stable because it served the interests of both sociology and social work. Sociology was provided with a vocationally oriented option for its undergraduate students, while social work benefited by having a secure place in the university with an established liberal arts discipline. This arrangement became less advantageous to social work, however, as undergraduate social work education moved toward professionalization (Bromley and Weed, 1978:175). Important steps in the trend toward professionalization were the 1967 guidelines of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) that allowed colleges and universities to have approved undergraduate programs and membership in the CSWE, the extension of full membership rights to graduates of CSWE-approved baccalaureate programs by the National Association of Social Workers in 1970, and the implementation of accreditation standards for baccalaureate programs in social work by the CSWE in 1974 (Bromley and Weed, 1978:176-177).

Several revisions were made in CSWE guidelines between 1967 and 1974 that had the effect of weakening the relationship between sociology and social work in the undergraduate curriculum. One such change is that the guidelines became increasingly restrictive regarding the issue of control by social work faculty over curriculum planning and implementation (Bromley and Weed, 1978:177-178). This concern with autonomy is largely responsible for a dramatic decline in the percentage of undergraduate social work programs that are located in social science departments, and a corresponding increase in autonomous social work departments. In 1967, 84% of CSWE-approved undergraduate social work programs were housed within social science departments, usually sociology (Dolgoff, 1979:24). In 1979 a sample of 22 accredited programs included 23% that were housed in social science departments, with the remainder being housed in social work departments or with graduate schools of social work (Leighninger and Leighninger, 1980:113). CSWE guidelines also became more permissive regarding the teaching of social science content by social work faculty. This contributed to a shift in required social science credit hours from social science disciplines to social work (Leighninger and Leighninger, 1980:115-117).

Although undergraduate sociology and social work curricula have been diverging in recent years, the trend toward applied sociology curricula should increase the advantages of cooperation for both sociology and social work. Social work students will be more effective practitioners if they are exposed to sociological theories and concepts that can be translated into terms usable in social work practice. To the extent that applied sociology programs make sociologists more sensitive to the issue of the applicability of sociological concepts and theory, social work students

will find the sociology courses they take to be more useful to them. Students in applied sociology programs also can benefit from exposure to the discipline of social work. Social workers are more experienced regarding issues related to practice. Since many baccalaureate level applied sociology graduates will find employment in occupations directly concerned with practice, social work courses are an effective complement to applied sociology curricula.

OBSTACLES TO COOPERATION

Despite the advantages of closer cooperation between applied sociology and social work in undergraduate education, a number of obstacles may prevent this from occurring. Four potential obstacles are identified below, arranged from general to specific. First, overestimation of the differences between disciplines may lead sociologists and social workers to discount the value of cooperation. On the other hand, recognition of the overlapping interests of applied sociology and social work may blur disciplinary boundaries, which also may lead to a reluctance to cooperate. Closely related to this point is a third obstacle - competition between applied sociology and social work programs for students. Finally, departmental politics may impede cooperation between applied sociology and social work programs in combined departments.

Prevailing conceptions of the differences between sociology and social work often are an obstacle to closer cooperation. Overemphasis of disciplinary differences may lead sociologists or social workers to regard as relatively unimportant the potential contributions that the other discipline can make to their own. The difference between sociology and social work has been described as "science vs. practice" (e.g. Greenwood, 1955) or "science vs. art" (e.g. McInver, 1931). Thus, Heraud (1970:272) notes that some social workers regard the scientific approach of sociology

as incompatible with what they see as the artistic quality of social work. Likewise, Shimer (1976:109) notes that sociologists often place a low value on practice courses and devalue contributions to practice, as compared with scholarly publications. Although such conceptions of disciplinary differences are still quite popular, they are becoming more tempered. For example, Leighninger, et al. (1974) argue that the "science vs. art" dichotomy is inaccurate; although sociology and social work may differ in the extent to which they emphasize scientific and practical concerns, each discipline ultimately is concerned with both. Future development of applied sociology may blur this distinction even more, resulting in a greater recognition of the mutual interests of sociology (particularly applied sociology) and social work.

The realization that applied sociology and social work have overlapping interests creates problems of defining the boundaries of applied sociology and social work. Thus, I have observed in my conversations with social workers about applied sociology that the first questions asked tend to be "What is applied sociology?" and "How is that different from social work?" Unfortunately, there may be no satisfactory answer to the latter question, at least with regard to undergraduate education. Most of the differences cited between applied sociology and social work revolve around the relative emphasis on scientific and practical concerns cited earlier. (See Greenwood, 1955, for an elaboration of these differences.) However, this distinction is not very useful for differentiating baccalaureate level graduates of applied sociology and social work programs; both are likely to be involved mainly in practice. Other differences could be noted--for example, the stronger interdisciplinary emphasis in undergraduate social work education and the broader range of contexts in which graduates of

applied sociology programs are likely to be employed--but these may not be very convincing to social workers. Thus, Munson (1979:619) notes, "Sociologists are placing more emphasis on defining and implementing applied sociology programs that do not substantially differ from social work programs, and this is being done with little or no input from social workers."

This comment illustrates the close connection between the issues of disciplinary boundaries and competition for students. Social workers often suspect that applied sociology programs are little more than a device to lure students to sociology with programs that are not substantially different from social work, and perhaps not as rigorous. Of course, there is more than a grain of truth in this perception; sociologists generally do view applied sociology programs as a way of attracting students (Mauksch, 1983: 314). On the other hand, sociologists must be careful to communicate to social workers that applied sociology is a legitimate, traditional concern in sociology.

The problem of competition with social work is often handled by designing the applied sociology program in such a way as to minimize overlap. For example, Karlstrom (1983:8) notes that one particularly sensitive area for social workers is the "micro" level of practice. Consequently, sociologists wishing to avoid conflict with social work would be well-advised to steer clear of counseling and other individual-level applications. An emphasis on research methods in the applied sociology program is likely to be less threatening to social workers, as are other emphases of a clearly sociological nature. As these suggestions indicate, dealing with the problem of competition also helps to resolve the problem of disciplinary boundaries--if not in an absolute sense, at least in terms of establishing an understanding of how the particular applied sociology and social work programs differ from each other.

Departmental politics is the fourth type of obstacle to cooperation between sociology and social work. Earlier I mentioned that the professionalization of undergraduate social work education has been the principal factor in the breakdown of the traditional "alliance" between sociology and social work in undergraduate education. However, professionalization has had a destabilizing impact largely because the pattern of accomodations between sociology and social work that were developed in the traditional alliance were incompatible with the trend toward professionalism. "Departmental politics" in the present context, then, refers to patterns of accomodation in combined sociology/social work departments that inhibit the autonomy and growth of academic programs in one of the disciplines (usually social work). Although the following discussion is most pertinent for combined departments, it also has some relevance for other administrative arrangements.

Shimer (1977:109) notes that, to a certain extent, recent conflict between sociologists and social workers in combined departments is a by-product of the growth of social work. As social work expands relative to sociology, sociology faculty are reluctant to give social work the autonomy it needs to develop. Instead, sociologists may engage in practices bordering on exploitation as they seek to protect their own position, often at the expense of social work. Such practices are made more likely by the tendency for sociologists to be more numerous and to have more senior status than social workers in combined departments. Another factor contributing to conflict between sociologists and social workers in combined departments is the different logic of professional and liberal arts education (Bromley and Weed, 1978:179). For example, hiring, promotion, and tenure criteria may not take seriously the notion of a "terminal" M.S.W.

(Shimer, 1977:111). In addition, sociologists may have little understanding of the importance of agency contacts, field coordination, field instruction, and the justification for credit hours and release time provided for these activities (Shimer, 1977:109). It is worth noting that such misunderstandings should be less likely to occur in departments with applied sociology programs, due to the overlapping concerns of applied sociology and social work.

Two particularly important problem areas in combined departments are the visibility of the social work program and the degree of autonomy provided the social work program with regard to curriculum matters. The visibility of the social work program is often less than it would be in an autonomous department. For example, "social work" may not be included in the title of the department, social work courses may not be listed separately in the university catalogue, and transcripts may not differentiate between sociology and social work graduates (Bromley and Weed, 1978:183; Shimer, 1977:111). In addition, control by social work faculty over the social work curriculum often is compromised in combined departments. Sociology faculty may attempt to "cash in" on the popularity of social work by manipulating the social work curriculum to include a larger number of sociology courses than may be desired by social work faculty (Shimer, 1977:111).

Shimer (1977:110) notes that there is a lot of variation in the extent to which these problems characterize combined departments. Because they are frequent sources of conflict, however, sociologists in combined departments would be well-advised to assess these factors before implementing applied sociology curricula. Otherwise, there is a danger that the applied sociology program may exacerbate conflict and increase the pressure toward a departmental split. While a departmental split may relieve tensions stemming from departmental politics, it is not likely to facilitate greater cooperation with social work.

ALTERNATIVE PATHS TO COOPERATION

A number of different cooperative arrangements are possible between undergraduate programs in applied sociology and social work. One alternative would be to merge applied sociology and social work into a single program (Karlstrom, 1983:8). This approach would fit in with what some scholars see as a need for a closer convergence between the disciplines of sociology and social work. Chaiklin (1974:106), for example, suggests that sociology and social work would both benefit from the creation of a hybrid discipline. (He also suggests that clinical sociology might be an appropriate candidate for such a hybrid discipline.) Merged programs would maximize interaction between faculty and students in the two disciplines and would help to transcend the limitations of applied sociology and social work programs. However, it is unlikely that this approach will become popular in the forseeable future. Social Work has become committed to producing professional social workers at the undergraduate level, and it would be difficult to obtain CSWE accreditation for such programs. In addition, sociologists as well as social workers would be troubled by the blurring of disciplinary boundaries and the difficulty of creating identification with the parent disciplines in merged programs.

Another alternative is to make social work courses available as options for applied sociology students. The most obvious way to do this is through a minor in social work. The University of Wisconsin - Whitewater, for example, incorporates minors as tracks within the sociology major and includes tracks in social welfare casework; juvenile probation, residential, and group home treatment; and adult probation, parole, halfway houses and prisons. Unfortunately, however, minors in social work are often unavailable. Because the primary goal of social work education is to produce professional social workers and a minor in social work will not provide a

complete professional education, many social work programs do not offer minors. Double majors are also often impractical, due to the large number of credits that are usually required in social work programs. A more modest option is to incorporate social work courses as electives among the substantive courses in the applied sociology program. For example, our applied sociology program at St. Cloud State University includes social work courses in adolescent problems and the social welfare institution as elective substantive courses.

Social workers also may be a valuable resource in designing and implementing applied sociology curricula. Their experience with internships and in integrating practical and theoretical concerns in their courses may prove useful to sociologists who are less experienced in these matters.

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